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ALBERTA BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER

A Project of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists

Vol. 3, No. 1

Editor: H. Loney Dickson
Executive Director: Jack Clements

Spring, 1989

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WOW! ANOTHER GREAT FIELD SEASON

Congratulations once again to all Atlassers and Regional Coordinators for making the second field season such a huge success. Just look at the number of returns to project headquarters. There have been some late arrivals for 1987 data, so the number of both 1987 and 1988 returns are listed for comparison.

The number of returns for 1988 was nearly double the number for 1987. A few Regional Coordinators said that there are still a few more 1988 cards to be sent in.

What a tremendous effort. I know that we are all anxious to see the results of a computer analysis of all the data. The computer system is nearly ready, and I believe it is at the stage where I can virtually guarantee that results will be available for the next issue of the newsletter. Congratulations! ❑

—Jack Clements

REGION	1987 FIELD CARDS	1987 CASUAL FORMS	1988 FIELD CARDS	1988 CASUAL FORMS	1988 RARE BIRD FORMS
1. Lethbridge	14	3	8	1	
2. Medicine Hat	13	24	40	33	6
3. Calgary	21		37	4	
4. Sylvan Lake-Stettler	37	2	62	31	1
5. Vermilion-Wainwright	13		20		2
6. Jasper-Edson	14	4	29	3	
7. Edmonton	51	1	97	1	11
8. St. Paul-Cold Lake	12	10	31		
9. Ft. McMurray	23	3	13	1	17
10. Grande Prairie-Peace River	16	1	32	—	2
SUB-TOTAL	214	48	369	74	39
TOTAL	362		482		

THE JAMES L. BAILLIE MEMORIAL FUND

The James L. Baillie Memorial Fund For Bird Research And Preservation sponsored the mailing of this issue of the *Alberta Bird Atlas Newsletter.*

The Trustees of the Fund requested that the donation cover a specific item in the project budget. Grants from The James L. Baillie Memorial Fund For Bird Research And Preservation provides grants to encourage field studies by amateur naturalists and to support projects that increase or disseminate knowledge of birds in their natural environment or contribute to their preservation. ❑

NEWS FLASH – REGIONAL COORDINATORS

Kevin Van Tighem resigned as Regional Coordinator, Jasper-Edson Region, effective at the end of February. Kevin worked hard as coordinator and effectively got the region off to a solid start by recruiting Atlassers, promoting the project, holding Atlasser workshops and arranging for publicity in newspapers. Good work Kevin, and we wish you well in your new endeavours.

Welcome Rick Bonar as the new Regional Coordinator for the Jasper-Edson Region, effective at the first of March 1989. Rick is a wildlife biologist with Weldwood of Canada Limited (Hinton Division), and can be reached at: Rick Bonar, Weldwood of Canada Limited (Hinton Division), 760 Switzer Drive, Hinton, Alberta, T7V 1V7. Office phone: 865-8193 or 865-2251, residence phone: 865-5719.

Rick brings a lot of enthusiasm to his new role in the Alberta Bird Atlas Project. Welcome aboard. ❑

REMOTE AREAS PROGRAM

The remote areas program is designed to help get Atlassers into remote areas to survey squares. Response to the remote areas questionnaire has been enthusiastic, with requests by Atlassers wishing to become involved in the program.

Remote area trips have already been targeted for the Fort McMurray and Sylvan Lake-Stettler regions for

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

each of the remaining three years of the project. Included are a road trip in Wood Buffalo National Park and a canoe trip down the Brazeau River. Anyone interested in helping to organize and participate in hiking and horseback trips in the Sylvan Lake-Stettler Region, west of Rocky Mountain House, should contact Myrna Pearman (RC) or project headquarters. Specific trips are also being identified for other regions. If you are interested in atlassing in a remote area, please let us know.

Rob Gardner, Regional Coordinator for the Medicine Hat Region needs more Atlassers! Please contact Rob, or project headquarters, if you would like to help out by doing a square in this Region. Your assistance would be greatly appreciated! ❑

—Mike Kelly

BIRD QUIZ I

Without looking anything up, can you identify this breeding bird from the clues presented? Don't skim over the clues, they are presented in descending order of difficulty. The fewer clues you need to correctly identify the bird, the better your abilities. We recommend concealing the clues below the one you're reading. The answer will be in the next issue of the newsletter.

- ☐ A 14 cm ground-nester that has rictal bristles and a lot of siblings.
- ☐ Nest: A cup made from rootlets, mosses, stems, and grasses on a mossy hummock or tree roots.
- ☐ White eggs: 3-5 with sparse speckling or blotches of brown, cinnamon, or purple; incubated 12 days in late June or early July.
- ☐ Altricial young: brownish-olive down; leave nest after 15 days.
- ☐ Winter range: eastern Mexico and Central America.
- ☐ Breeding habitat: muskeg, tangled alder thickets in swamps beside lakes or streams of damp mossy coniferous or mixed wood forests.
- ☐ Eats insects.
- ☐ Has wingbars and perches upright with tail hanging down or flicking.
- ☐ The only ground-nesting flycatcher.
- ☐ Doesn't flick its wings when it flicks its tail.
- ☐ Song: liquid killik (chelek or chiliks).
- ☐ Call note: chu-wee (chu-weep); soft with the second note rising.
- ☐ Often an exceptionally yellow throat, abdomen, and eye-ring, most of which is retained in fall migrants. ❑

REGIONAL NEWS

There were a lot of exciting bird sightings and confirmation of nesting of some very interesting species over the past field season. There is also a number of things happening in the various regions which you, as an active Atlasser, will want to know about.

1. Lethbridge Region

In Lethbridge Region, Atlassers were very busy working on a number of squares this past breeding season. Bill Sharp (RC) indicated that although nothing out of the ordinary was discovered they did have a good season. Plans are underway to get more square-bashing done this coming field season.

2. Medicine Hat Region

Bob Gardner (RC) reports superb results for the 1988 atlassing season. Dave Moore sighted a red-headed woodpecker near Drumheller and Michael O'Shea reports sage thrashers nesting south of Medicine Hat. Dennis Baresco saw two yellow-bellied flycatchers defending a nest near Oyen. Other noteworthy species sighted in the Region were Clarke's grebe, a possible sage sparrow, common loon and snowy egret. A nesting Cooper's hawk was also reported. During the fall migration a chestnut-sided warbler was reported by Dennis Baresco and Mark Oxamitry at Police Point. Medicine Hat even lucked out this winter with three different sightings of gyrfalcon which appear to represent two different birds.

Bob reports that the Region will be conducting an owl prowl in the next couple of weeks and that Michael O'Shea will be coordinating a great horned owl and horned lark blitz throughout the Region. Bob also reports that a square blitz will again occur on the Suffield block and asks anyone interested in participating should give him a call (there is still room for a couple of people).

Although this news is too late for your participation, **readers may be interested that the Region is again holding their Annual Sage Grouse/ Sharp-tailed Grouse Dancing Tour on April 9th.** Last year they saw over 40 sage grouse. You may want to keep this event in mind for next year.

3. Calgary Region

Bob Storms (RC) has a great story about the sighting of a Kentucky warbler, the first record for Alberta. This bird was sighted on a Saturday in mid-June and the next day a group of Atlassers went out again to see it. Not only did they find the warbler again, but they also turned up a grasshopper sparrow, a blackburnian warbler and a black-headed grosbeak. Not bad for a days outing.

Other exciting birds from the Region include an unconfirmed fork-tailed flycatcher and a singing mourning warbler. This fall brought a few more interesting birds to Calgary Region with great-crested flycatcher, an immature Sabines gull on Eagle Lake, an immature mew gull and a red phalarope being sighted.

This Region also had a trumpeter swan and gyrfalcons over the winter months.

Bob indicates that the Region is hoping to get Atlassers out to sites on the edge of the Region this year. Good luck for 1989.

4. Sylvan Lake/Stettler Region

Lloyd Lohr (RC) reports a black-crowned night heron sighting but no nests. He also notes that this species was known to nest in the area before

the drought. Lloyd also reports great crested flycatchers near Stettler and Myrna Pearman (RC) sighted them near Sylvan Lake. Myrna also had single sightings of tree sparrow and bobolink in the same location. *Plans are presently gearing up for the 1989 field season.*

5. Vermilion-Wainwright Region

Iris Davies (RC) reports all sorts of interesting birds in the Vermilion-Wainright Region. Dan Hungle found

a ferruginous hawk with nestlings and also reports burrowing owls. A black-billed cuckoo was also sighted in the Region. Suzanne Benoit and Richard Klauke report two interesting shorebird spring migrants – 30 long-billed dowitcher and 2 whimbrel – at Kenilworth Lake.

The Region has been very busy with its training program as well, with Jack Parkes conducting an identification workshop in Castor at the beginning of March. **A workshop is also scheduled for April 4 with the Vermilion River Naturalist's Club.** Blair Rippen of Alberta Fish & Wildlife has agreed to come up and talk about bird watching techniques among other helpful topics.

In May, the Region will be holding another identification workshop at David Lake along with a little square bashing at the same time.

6. Jasper-Edson Region

This is Kevin Van Tighem's last report to the Newsletter as Regional Coordinator. Kevin noted that in one small aspen grove in Valley of the Five Lakes in Jasper they found pileated woodpeckers, Barrows goldeneye and northern flicker all nesting.

The Region also turned up two active merlin nests and the same two bald eagle nests (as last years) in Jasper. Other nesting species include red-necked grebe in Jasper, Cape May warbler at Obed Lake, bohemian waxwing at Brule, and a ring-necked duck brood at Yellowhead pass.

Kevin also reports that Roy Richards discovered and photographed a Bendire's flycatcher at Buffalo Prairie in Jasper. This was probably the highlight species of the year although the male house finch, which hung around Jasper for three weeks last spring, was also pretty exciting.

Kevin mentioned that with the help of Beth MacCallum and Richard Quinlan as Coordinators this past year, the Region received much broader coverage and gained a number of new Atlassers.

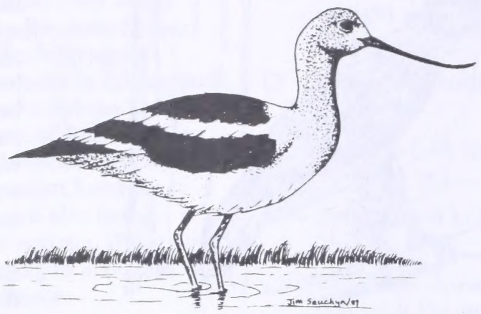
The Region is pleased with the involvement various industries in the region are having with the project and expect that this will enable previously inaccessible areas to be Atlassed this coming year.

7. Edmonton Region

Gerry Lunn acting RC reports a number of interesting sightings and breeding records around the Region in 1988. Of the breeders, Jim Lange reports observing juveniles of both great gray and hawk owls. The sightings include Costa's hummingbird near Ponoka, three sightings of bobolinks near Cynthia and at Beaverhill Lake, a black-billed cuckoo and a black-legged kittiwake at Lac St. Anne by Barb and Jim Beck. The Becks also report a trumpeter swan which started building a nest but abandoned the effort and an eastern meadowlark on territory. The Becks have sent a tape recording of the latter species to Cornell University for confirmation. Gerry Lunn reports two black-necked stilts on Miquelon Lake in early July. Peregrine falcons, lazuli bunting, Baird's sparrow, sedge wrens and Sprague's pipit were also sighted in the Region.

8. St. Paul-Cold Lake Region

Unfortunately Richard Klauke (RC) was unavailable to provide any news for his Region. I hope by the next Newsletter that I will have heard from Richard. *–(The Editor).*



9. Grande Prairie-Peace River

Peter Kennedy (RC) reports that the highlight nesting species has to be the calliope hummingbird. Chel MacDonald reports sighting peregrine falcon and American avocets on Kimiwan Lake. The region has also had an exciting post atlassing period with peregrine falcon, gyrfalcon and three great gray owls being reported. The Region is now gearing up for the owl nesting season.

10. Fort McMurray

Brad Arner (RC) reports that Chel MacDonald and Sue Draxler and others saw bald and golden eagles and hooded merganser while on the Clearwater River canoe trip. See Chel's article in the last newsletter (Vol.2 No.3) for more details on this trip. Brad also reports that Atlassers turned up a number of species normally found nesting to the south. These include 3 squares with nesting American goldfinch, a nest building loggerhead shrike, nesting black-billed magpie (the first time for the McMurray area), ruby-throated hummingbirds doing courtship displays; and western meadowlark and mourning dove sightings. So far 34 squares have been studied, 5 of which are completed.

In 1989 a party of six people will head off for an eight day square bashing trip on the Peace-Athabasca Delta, with hopes of completing two squares in two different blocks.

Brad is also trying to find a group of people interested in square bashing along the Wabasca River in the southeast corner of the region. Anyone interested in helping out or doing this trip should contact Brad in Fort McMurray. ❑

ADEQUATE COVERAGE OF A SQUARE

Atlassers often ask their Regional Coordinators or project headquarters "How much effort should I, or my group of Atlassers, put into Atlassing a square?"

A square is considered to be adequately covered if:

- ✔ you have identified at least 75% of the number of species expected for your Region;
- ✔ half of the number of species identified in the square (based upon 75% of the expected number of species for the Region) are in the confirmed category;
- ✔ 35% of the number of species identified on the square (based on expected number of species for the Region) are in the probable category; and
- ✔ 15% of the number of species identified on the square (based upon the expected number of species for the Region) are in the possible category.

For example, let's suppose there are 136 species expected in your Region. What are the target numbers of species in each of the criteria listed above for your square? **Your targets are:**

NUMBER OF SPECIES	102
NUMBER OF *CONFIRMED* SPECIES	51
NUMBER OF *PROBABLE* SPECIES	36
NUMBER OF *POSSIBLE* SPECIES	15

Ask your Regional Coordinator how many species to expect in your Region, or in any other Region where you will be Atlassing. Remember, these targets are not cast in concrete. You might easily meet these targets and surpass them, and of course your extra effort would help the project. At the same time you should remember that if you exceed the minimum target numbers and are putting more effort into getting fewer and fewer additional numbers of species, it would likely be far better for the projects if you put that effort into a new square.

ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS IN NEW YORK STATE

Cornell University Press is proud to announce the publication of *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State*, a lavishly illustrated and easy-to-use reference that gives instant information about 238 birds native to New York. Data for this book was collected by over 4000 volunteers under the supervision of the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs. *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State*, edited by Robert F. Andrle and Janet R. Carroll, is available from: Cornell University Press, P.O. Box 6525, Ithaca, New York 14851, U.S.A. for $29.95 (U.S. Dollars). Eight supplementary acetate map overlays, showing ecozones, elevations, mean temperatures, precipitation, potential forest type and forest cover, river systems, and Federal and state wildlife areas and counties are also available for $12.95 (U.S. Dollars) making the publication price for the set just $42.90 U.S. plus $2.50 U.S. postage and handling. ❑

DID YOU KNOW...

... the *Alberta Bird Atlas Newsletter* is mailed to 171 communities in Alberta, to all other provinces, the United States, Australia and Great Britain?

THIS CENSUS IS FOR THE BIRDS

by Ross Macdonald in Outdoors with Ross MacDonald (17 May 1988). Reprinted with permission of The Crowsnest Pass Promoter.

We thought the following newspaper article would be of interest to our readers. *–(Jack Clements & The Editor).*

"I suppose with my natural interest in birds I would eventually get involved with another volunteer project. I have been aware of the Alberta Bird Atlas work for about a year now. Like most people I thought it sounded like a good idea but I just never made the commitment to get involved.

Enter the villain, stage left. In this case it turns out to be our local habitat biologist from the fish and wildlife branch. Daryl Wig causally asked me if I was interested in meeting Bill Sharp, who is a regional co-ordinator for the Alberta Bird Atlas.

Well naturally, such a meeting could produce some information for my column so I said okay. I got information for my column and those two conspirators got another "atlaser." I am slowly learning the trick is to write about these guys, not get involved with them.

The atlas is a very ambitious project that will no doubt be of great use to many people once it is completed. It is an inventory of breeding birds in Alberta. It will provide a base line of data against which our descendants will be able to judge how well we are treating our environment. Birds, you see, are a very good barometer on the health of the world around us.

It turns out to be very easy to become a volunteer for this project. They talk you into taking a census of your very own 10x10 kilometer square of map. The map is flat and to put it mildly the country is not. There are a few other pit-falls to be aware of. My bird identification book is a little old and some of the common names of birds have been changed.

On my first outing I decided to do this thing just like a pro. I had my binoculars, by bird book, and of course the list of birds to be looked for. Well lo and behold I spotted my first bird I wasn't familiar with (it wasn't a robin). I looked at the bird through the glasses and then looked at the book. After a lot of fumbling with both I finally identified the bird as a Myrtle warbler. "Ha!" says I, "this is a piece of cake." So next I look at the list of birds to check off – no Myrtle warbler. Thankfully I was aware that they changed the names of some of the birds. What to do? Well naturally I phoned the guy who got me into this, Daryl. He promptly informed me I had a yellow-rumped warbler. Wandering around birding isn't as easy as it sounds.

There are some benefits to birding if you're interested in the outdoors. I spent some time watching a bull moose eating willow shoots. His shoulders were completely bare of hair where the ticks got at him. These are not woodticks but a special kind of tick that just likes moose for some reason. A lot of hair was missing on most of his body. Oddly it was the long dark guard hair and not the light underdown that was missing. Consequently he looked very light in color, almost white. While watching the moose in a small pothole swamp I also added a green-winged teal to my "bag" for the day.

Now I'm sure there are some people out there who would like to get into this volunteer thing. It is very easy to get your very own 10x10 kilometer square. Just phone Bill Sharp at 328-2321 in Lethbridge. He's in the biology department of the University of Lethbridge. Locally we have a very pleasant chap who can be your contact man for the Alberta Bird Atlas: Daryl Wig, right here in Blairmore with the fish and wildlife branch at 562-7331. I must say that among the 101 jobs fish and wildlife is doing, helping out the Alberta Bird Atlas project is another chore. The atlas itself was conceived by the Federation of Alberta Naturalists. FAN, as it is called, is somewhat like the Alberta Fish and Game with local groups all over the province.

It is a lot of work down here at the grass roots level volunteering but it can be a darn good experience too. After all you could find a yellow-rumped warbler." ❑

BIRD QUIZ II

- ☐ The 18-21.5 cm male may have one but sometimes two females that look just like himself, otherwise both sexes tend to be solitary.
- ☐ Territories are established by both sexes in winter and in spring/summer, although most individuals migrate from Alberta when their habitat is covered by ice and snow.
- ☐ They have two eyelids per eye. The inner eyelid often flashes when they blink.
- ☐ The nest is like that of a wren.
- ☐ The song is complex, like that of a winter wren and must be loud to be heard.
- ☐ They nest on rocky ledges behind waterfalls in mountain areas.
- ☐ They scratch for insects among the rocks on the bottom of raging streams although they'll take minnows. They may even change their density to swim on top of the water but they can't get anywhere too fast this way with unwebbed feet.
- ☐ Dark grey in colour with strong legs and feet, this is the only truly aquatic passerine (perching bird).
- ☐ They are named after their distinctive continual habit of doing push ups on their legs. ❑

POSTAGE COSTS ✉

A reminder — postage costs have increased for us again.

We want to keep you up to date about the project. Please let us know at project headquarters if you change your address, so that we can keep the mailing list up to date. If you are no longer interested in receiving the newsletter, please drop us a card. ❑

ALBERTA BIRD ATLAS OWL PROGRAM

If you have not received your owl tapes, please contact your Regional Coordinator.

BIRD COURSES

Spring is a good time to get involved in birdwatching – to improve your identification skills, to add to your lists, or to learn the basics and prepare yourself to become an Atlasser!

Here is a list of some of the courses available this year. For other courses, contact your local educational facilities or your naturalist group.

CALGARY: CALGARY PARKS & RECREATION

(Inglewood Bird Sanctuary)
Phone 269-6688

BIRDING FIELD TRIPS

Designed for people desiring practice in field identification. Some previous birdwatching experience is recommended.
Various dates from April through September.

MAY BIRDWATCHING/ JUNE BIRDWATCHING

These two courses deal with field identification of birds in the Calgary area, as well as migration, distribution, habitat, song behaviour, and nesting.
Various dates in May and June. Fall courses (August) are also offered.

BIRDING IN BROOKS AREA

Four-day excursion to the Brooks area.
Orientation Thursday, April 20.
Trip May 29-June 1.

ALBERTA BIRD ATLAS PROJECT, C/O
Alberta
CULTURE AND MULTICULTURALISM
PROVINCIAL MUSEUM OF ALBERTA
12845 - 102 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
T5N 0M6

EDMONTON: JOHN JANZEN NATURE CENTRE

Phone 428-7900

BIRD WATCHING

Learn the basics of bird watching and the best locations and times to see birds in the Edmonton area, plus a field trip to the Clifford E. Lee Nature Sanctuary.
May 11-27.

BEAVERHILL LAKE

This bus trip will take you to an important migration stop to view geese, swans, song birds, and more.
May 14.

LAKE ISLE (CAMP HE-HO-HA) ELDERHOSTEL

Canada, 29 Prince Arthur Avenue
Toronto, M5R 1B2

For over-60's— join an Elderhostel group for a week to observe birds in this beautiful setting.
August 7-September 2.

—June Seidel

BIRDERS CARRY WEIGHT

Did you know that 1.2 million Canadians consider themselves serious birders with an additional 3.6 million describing themselves as casual watchers? How about the fact that Point Pelee National Park on the tip of Lake Erie attracts 500,000 visitors each year!

These and other interesting tidbits are reported in an article in the May 23, 1988 issue of *Macleans* Magazine. Jim Butler, Professor of Parks and Wildlife at the University of Alberta, who has studied the economic impact of birders says in the article that $2.1 million is spent on film, other sundries, and services in the month of May alone in Point Pelee National Park and the three adjacent communities. Bird watching is becoming more popular in our society and is one of the best non-consumptive, low impact uses of wildlife resources. Certainly the image of eccentric bird watchers is a thing of the past as the popularity of this sport continues to increase. Good work and keep those binos focused while enjoying Canada's fastest growing hobby sport. ❐

—Bob Gerlock

HABITAT STEWARD PROGRAM

The Red Deer River Naturalists have initiated a unique program that recognizes rural landowners who conserve wildlife habitat on their property.

Landowners who, on their own initiative and at their own expense, maintain a minimum of five acres of wildlife habitat can apply to the Red Deer River Naturalists to obtain a large, attractive blue and white HABITAT STEWARD gate sign. The signs have been generously donated by Alberta Government Telephones (AGT).

To date, close to 50 signs have been presented. The area covered by the program amounts to more than 6,000 acres!

If you are interested in participating in this program, or would like to nominate a deserving farmer or acreage-owner, we invite you to contact the Project Coordinator, Mr. Murray Mackay, at 783-4310, or write to the Red Deer River Naturalists (Box 785, Red Deer, Alta T5N 5H2). ❑

—Myrna D. Pearman

EDITORS NOTE:

Do you have an interesting story about a bird sighting or an outing while Atlassing, or a way to identify difficult bird species? Why not put your thoughts to paper and do an article for the Newsletter! Or better yet, give me a call (403-468-8917) and tell me the story and I'll write the article on your behalf. Don't forget this is your Newsletter and with a little help I can add another two pages to the next issue.

—H. Loney Dickson. (Editor).